THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRI E.V.K.S. ELANGOVAN): (a) Yes, Sir. As per the lates Figures export of steel show an increase as seen in the following table:

(Value in Rs. Crores)

Item	2001-02	2002-03	2003-04	April' 04—August' 04
Steel Exports (ITC	564.86	1438.61 (+154.68%	886.33 (-38.39%)	1624.63

Source: DGCI&S, Kolkata

(b) and (c) Some of the steps taken to boost the export of steel are as follows:

(i) The Medium Term Export Strategies of the Government emphasize on exploring alternate export markets and improved export incentives under the Duty Exemption/Remission Scheme provided by the Government of India;

(ii) Extending support to the industry in dealing with cases of trade action like imposition of anti-dumping, countervailing and safeguard duties, with the concerned countries or at the WTO;

(iii) Support by the different wings of the Government to boost exports, disseminate information pertaining to global trade and WTO-related issues and organisation of seminars/Avorkshops to facilitate greater interaction between the exporting community.

Amendment in Patent Act

1783. SHRI K. RAMA MOHANA RAO: Will the Minister of COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that some of Government's coalition partners are opposing tooth and nail the proposed amendments to the Patent Act;

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) whether any amendments have been proposed by some of the UPA constituents; and

(d) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRI E.V.K.S. ELANGOVAN): (a) to (d) Representations/ suggestions have been received from different quarters, including UPA constituents on the proposed amendment to the Patents Act, which is intended to introduce product patent protection for inventions in the fields of food, chemicals and pharmaceuticals in addition to the existing process patent protection, in terms of India's obligation under the Agreement on Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS Agreement) required to be put in place before 1.1.2005. All views and concerns will be taken into consideration suitably before finalising the said amendment.

Indo-Pak Joint Study Group

† 1784. SHRI R.S. GAVAI: Will the Minister of COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that India and Pakistan have constituted a Joint Study Group; and

(b) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRI E.V.K.S. ELANGOVAN): (a) and (b) Commerce and Industry Minister participated in the 4th SAARC Commerce Ministers' Meeting in Islamabad on November 22-23,2004. This meeting reviewed the progress in economic cooperation since the 3rd Meeting of the SAARC Commerce Ministers. It noted with satisfaction the significant progress recorded in regional economic cooperation, in particular, the signing of the SAFTA Agreement. On this occasion, Commerce Ministers of India and Pakistan; had a separate interaction for laying down a roadmap for promoting trade between the two countries. They agreed to set up a Joint Study Group at Commerce Secretaries' level of both the countries for evolving a strategy for boosting trade between India and Pakistan.

† Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.